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ABSTRACT

Educators have become so involved with delivering the curricula that they fail to acknowledge "how" they deliver the curricula. This paper considers the different forms of verbal and nonverbal communications in the classroom, cultural communications in the classroom, and communication enhancers for the classroom--issues which are major crossroads in the path to receiving a successful education. The paper contends that educators are doing an inferior job educating poor children. According to the paper, when a child does not speak Standard English, the teacher must be able to reach the child on his/her level of understanding and transfer him/her to the standard level of understanding; effective classroom communication requires the teacher and students to be able to send and receive messages accurately. It states that reccgnizing and appreciating communication diversity (i.e., culture) allows children to feel good about themselves, and that if the classroom teacher and the speech teacher were to team up, they could coordinate interaction with the students and provide beneficial bilingual and bicultural programs. It stresses that teachers must understand the nature of language and the nature of dialect differences and then they must decide how to approach the problem--they can recognize "non-standard" dialect and eradicate it, leave the student language alone, or accept bidialectalism. The paper states that the classroom should: provide a variety of stimuli; provide a secure, comfortable feeling; be adapted to fit the activity; and give some privacy and individuality. Contains 7 references. (NKA)

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COMMUNICATION
In the Classroom

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Introduction

Communication is the driving force in any relationship or situation. Although we exist during a time when communication is the lifeline for society, it has also become one of our most disturbing, yet intimate forms of connecting.

We communicate on a continuous basis at home, work, and school. If we surveyed individuals to determine where the most important communications took place, each person would have a different answer, and each answer would be correct. It is vitally important to know when communication should take place, where it should take place, and why one should communicate. When a child reaches school age, a whole new world of communication is open to him. He learns that there are different languages, cross cultural communication, and gender differences in communicating. He learns that these differences also exist in nonverbal communications. He learns how to express himself and how to accept the expressions of others. The issue of communicating has become more than a tribal concern in our school. We have become so involved with delivering the curricula that we fail to acknowledge ***how we*** deliver the curricula. Although it is not a racial issue, educators are doing an inferior job educating poor children. Diverting public attention to curricula, educators eloquently camouflage the true problem, communication in the classroom. The real issue, I think, lies within the saying, "It's not what you do or say, but rather, how you do or say it".

In this article I will share with you the different forms of verbal and nonverbal communications in the classroom, cultural communications in the

classroom, and communication enhancers for the classroom. As a teacher for the Chatham County Board of Education, I perceive these issues to be major crossroads in the path to receiving a successful education.

Verbal and Non-Verbal Communications In The Classroom

Communication is an ongoing process of sending and receiving messages that enable humans to share knowledge, attitudes, and skills. Effective teaching depends on successful communication. When teachers and students interact, explicit communication is occurring (Miller, 1988, p.4).

There are two forms of communication, verbal and nonverbal. When communication is done without words, it is considered to be nonverbal. This form of communication may include facial expressions, touching, body movements, dress, posture, and even spatial distance. When communication is done with words, it is considered to be verbal. Although verbal and nonverbal communications are interdependent, nonverbal behaviors are used to support or modify verbal behaviors. Knapp (1972) list the following six ways in which verbal and nonverbal behaviors interact.

1. Repeating—nonverbal behavior sometimes repeats what was said verbally. Ex. "Go outside", then points to the door.
2. Contradicting—nonverbal behavior sometimes contradict what was said. Ex. A student tells you he is not nervous, but is trembling and timid.

3. Substituting—nonverbal can be used in the place of verbal. Ex. A stare into your lovers' eyes and substitute for the words, "I love you".
4. Complementing—nonverbal can elaborate or modify verbal. Ex. A student may show nervous tension when taking a test, but relaxes as he gets closer to the end of the test.
5. Accenting—nonverbal may accent verbal. Ex. The use of hand and head to emphasize what is being said.
6. Regulating—nonverbal behaviors regulate the flow of verbal conversation. Ex. Eye contact and head nods may signal who is or is not paying attention.

Verbal communication is as old as man. Most cultures bring their languages with them to America. America is said to be a melting pot of cultures, however, it is also a language pool for communicating. Just as the slaves bought their words from Africa, so did the Chinese bring their words from China. According to Dr. Dandy (1991), when two speakers of different languages make an effort to communicate, they use only the most essential words and place them in the fundamental structure to which they are accustomed (p. 23). Words carry power, structure, and tradition. Words have different meanings in different cultures at different times.

In the classroom, Standard English is the link of communication. The problem however, is that every child does not speak Standard English. When this situation exists, the teacher must be able to reach the child on his level of

understanding and transfer him to the standard level of understanding. Most teachers are unable to do what is necessary to achieve this goal.

The Ebonics plight, which occurred in Los Angeles last year, is a typical scenario. It was proposed that teachers learn Ebonics, Black English, so that they could better understand and teach Black students Standard English. The proposal was rejected because Standard English is the majority English. It is the language used to communicate in the business world, and it is used on all types of forms and in most written communications. All students, even Black students, should learn and used Standard English. Standard English is the premise of communication in the classroom. Standard English is the most acceptable dimension of communication between the teacher and the student.

Nonverbal communication is a part of the total communication process. There is almost, always, emotional communication in the nonverbal form. Nonverbal communication is used when one does not know what word or words to use, it is used to send a powerful signal, it is used when honesty counts, it is used to express feelings of distress, and it is used when the message is of a complex nature. According to Miller (1988), more feelings and intentions are sent and received using nonverbal communication rather than verbal communication. He suggests 7% are verbal as opposed to 93%, nonverbal.

Some of the components of nonverbal communication that are helpful in the classroom are:

1. Personal space—Children are taught the concept of personal space at an early age, which helps to avoid conflicts.

2. Facial Expression—muscle movements that change the expression on the face register different expressions. The old clique, "a picture is worth a thousand words", explains the meaning of facial expression. Students learn quickly what *certain looks* mean.

3. Touching—touching has been attacked and described as immoral. Young children are being taught to distinguish a "good touch" from a "bad touch". This has made touching an even greater component of nonverbal communication. A handshake is considered detrimental to the young child. Teachers touch to display a caring emotion. The meaning of a touch depends on the situation. As a child grows older, touching becomes less important.

4. Body Movements—These movements can not be masked. They send a true message. How one walks, stands, and even how he sits sends a message. Gestures and other body movements can be misunderstood, but are comprehended quicker than speech. Movement is visual and can be seen quicker than the spoken word can be heard. Standard English is positively universal; however, there are no universal body gestures. Two students slumping can mean two different things.

Effective communication in the classroom requires the teacher and students to be able to send and receive messages accurately. Nonverbal communication is by no means the most effective way to achieve this goal, however it is one of the many ways that is acceptable in the classroom. Nonverbal communication is a definite asset to verbal communication when used in the classroom setting.

Cultural Communications in the Classroom

Dr. Evelyn Dandy (1991) makes it very clear that understanding one's culture is the first step in understanding an individual. Recognizing and appreciating communication diversity allows children to feel good about themselves. As a Professor of Education at Armstrong Atlantic State University, in Savannah, Georgia, Dr. Dandy provides teachers with strategies that they can utilize to enhance African American students' understanding of the language necessary for career success.

Dialect has been defined as a language peculiar to a particular group or social class; jargon. Dr. Dandy (1991, p. IV) states that all English speaking people speak a dialect of their native language. Boyer (1983, p.6) said:

> "People who cannot communicate are powerless. People who know nothing of their past are culturally impoverished. People who cannot see beyond the confines of their own lives are ill-equipped to face the future. It is in the public school that this nation has chosen to pursue enlightened ends for all of its people. And this is where the battle for the future of America will be won or lost".

As a teacher in the classroom, I face many students who pronounce words differently because of their cultural background. In her book, Dr. Dandy (1991) points out that, sometimes reading for comprehension is more important than pronunciation. Whenever a teacher constantly calls attention to a child for pronunciation, it breaks the story lines, turns reading into a call-out-word

situation, and even more important, it deprives a child of his confidence and dignity. This should never happen in the classroom. Mispronunciation of word sounds is normally a characteristic of cultural diversity or dialect.

One of the rising concerns in education is the training of teachers to meet the high demands for cultural variations in the classroom. Earlier, I made reference to the political issue, called ***Ebonics.*** According to Nanette Asimov, a staff writer for the San Francisco Chronicles, Ebonics is defined as a distinct and separate language spoken by the Black race. The Los Angeles School Board of Education was considering the instruction of Ebonics as a part of its curriculum. This proposal was made because the Los Angeles Unified School District was failing to meet the needs of African American students in the area of English usage and literary skills—as a matter of fact; school districts throughout the nation are failing Black students. The proposal called for teacher training in Ebonics (Black language), in an attempt to prepare and help teachers better understand how to teach students mainstream English. The proposal was rejected in Los Angeles, where the majority student population is Latino; to the contrary a similar plan was accepted in Oakland, CA, where the majority student population is Black. The plight of Ebonics represents one link in the chain of education. We as a nation must take a systematic look at our educational system. As the needs of our children, and ultimately the needs of our society, change; we must be willing to make changes to meet these future needs. It has been confirmed by teachers, educators, researchers, and political figures, cross-cultural communications is fundamental in providing an effective education.

According to Adler (1993), if educators want to be prepared and perform with competency in the centuries to come, and cater to the needs of our children regardless to communication disorders and/or differences they should be conscious of (1) the growth within our multicultural population, (2) the variations of nontraditional language—learning environments, (3) the impact of poverty on the multicultural sector, (4) and they should be aware of academic and clinical assessments as well as therapeutic management of the children involved. As Dr. Dandy (1991) suggested, dialectal and attitudinal differences are proposing major educational problems. Children are not being given an opportunity to compare and contrast Standard English with their language or dialect. In fact, their language is being rejected as non-standard and creating a major communications junction. How do we as teachers connect to the student? How de we get to the other side?

At the early childhood stage, programs and projects are instituted to give preschoolers a "*headstart*". Many of these children have language conflicts and other barriers that set up blockades between the teacher and the student. When the child does poorly or fails, it is the fault of the school, not the child. The school has failed to provide curricula or alter its program to meet the needs of non-standard English speaking children.

There has been a recent spin in our curriculum. Emphasis on cross-cultural experiences is taking a stand, and attention is being given to dialectal and attitudinal problems. Scott (1985), a member of the Black Caucus National Council of Teachers of English, has noted the following:

> ...The language is a barrier in the educational process because of the stigma attached to it, the lack of respect given to it, and the lack of knowledge about it. All of the above factors have been shown to lead to damaged self-concepts of students, low expectations regarding the educability of students, ineffective instructional methods, and sometimes to inappropriate placement of students...(p.64)

If the classroom teacher and the speech teacher were to team up, they could coordinate interaction with the students and provide bilingual and bicultural programs that would benefit the students. The crucial problem we as educators are faced with is culturally diverse children with different dialects, which they fail to perceive as different. According to Adler (1993), non-standard dialect varies in phonology, lexicon, grammar, and nonverbal communication.

The solution to the problem is twofold. First, teachers must understand the nature of language and the nature of dialect differences. This can be done by interfacing with language specialists that provide services to the students. Second, teachers must decide how to approach the problem. They can recognize "non-standard" dialect and eradicate it, leave the student language alone, or accept bidialectalism. The latter assumes that students should learn to write and speak standard language while maintaining the dialect of their origins (Adler, 1993).

Communications Enhancers for the Classroom

Communication requires a two-way path; a path to a giver and a path to a receiver. Communication can only be effective when the message is transmitted and received. Sending and receiving messages effectively depend on a number of contributors. In my opinion, the mode used to send a message and the recipient of a message have the most important parts in making sure the communication is effective.

It is vitally important that the classroom present itself as a medium for transmitting messages. Much of what a child learns is based on the environment in which the learning takes place. In suggesting the classroom as the ultimate environment, Miller (1988) offers four guidelines to achieving effective communication.

1. The classroom should provide a variety of stimuli. The first step of learning includes motivation. Stimuli provides that spark of interest Which gives the teacher an opportunity to instruct effectively.

2. The classroom should provide a secure, comfortable feeling. It is no surprise that little or no learning will take place if a child does not feel safe and secure. Safety is one of the five levels on the hierarchy Of Needs.

3. The classroom should be adapted to fit the activity. Dr. Dandy (1991,

p. 159) said, "children must see themselves in books". Children have vivid imaginations. Much of their memory is based on what they see and do. The classroom provides a place of action to remember the occurrence.

4. The classroom should give some privacy and individually. The classroom ultimately allows a child to be a child.

Teachers will find that communicating effectively begins with the environment. Good teachers not only set the stage, but good teachers are good listeners. They listen to verbal and non-verbal messages. They know when a student desires to be heard. They know when and what signals to intercept; boredom, interest, agreement, and disagreement. They know when to show enthusiasm or concern, and when to use facial expressions or gestures. They know when to speak in a clear voice or when to use intonations. They know when to use humor and when to be serious. They know that knowledge is transmitted through effective communication and nurtured by the use of a variety of stimuli. Good communicators practice the use of non-verbal behaviors, they know that these behaviors can have a phenomenal effect on their communicating skills. Nonverbal behaviors can enhance student mannerism, actions, and characteristics. Using a variety of communication enhancers can make the classroom an exciting place to learn.

Conclusion

I have shared with you three areas of communication in the classroom that require improvement.

Society, in general, views anything different as negative or bad, including communication. The main component of education is communication. If the teacher were unable to communicate on the students' level, then that teacher would be unsuccessful in transporting that student to any level of proficiency. The old saying, "If you always do what you've always done, then you will always get what you've always gotten", is no longer true. Our country has changed, hence creating the need for changes in every aspect of society, even the education of our children. Unfortunately we have not kept abreast of the needs and values of our children. America is a pot that contains a variety of ethnic, racial, and lower class members of society. Yet we cater to one specific need. If this is the scenario, then part of who makes up our future will not be prepared for the task. Teachers, School Administrators, and politicians will need to be culturally sensitive in an attempt to acknowledge the fact that other cultures exist, other than their own culture. To rectify these flaws, might I suggest communicating with students on a number of levels; verbally, nonverbally, culturally, and using as many enhancers as possible. If we attempt to communicate on all levels, perhaps we can reach everyone on his level and bring him to a level of proficiency. This goal can only be achieved through effective communication.

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